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TAGS: PHUM PREL KN PL

SUBJECT: POLAND/DPRK - GROWING INTEREST IN PROMOTING HUMAN  
RIGHTS IN THE DPRK

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR DAN SAINZ FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The Polish Government is very interested in the humanitarian and human rights situation in North Korea (DPRK). MFA officials told Deputy Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea Christian Whiton that they are exploring ways to take effective action. The Poles expressed interest in providing a panelist to participate in an October 16 donor's conference in London; the panelist could share Poland's experiences under communism and describe democratization efforts in Belarus and Ukraine. Poland is skeptical about prospects for short-term change, but seeks to create a "snowball effect" toward positive change. The Poles believe Russia will be a key player in the future. Deputy FM Ryszard Schnepf is scheduled to travel to Pyongyang October ¶16. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Deputy Special Envoy Christian Whiton (G/SENK) met September 12 with Maciej Pisarski, Deputy Director of the Americas Department; Miroslaw Luczka, Deputy Director of the UN and Human Rights Department; and Krzysztof Ciebien of the Asia and Pacific Department. Whiton requested the meeting to discuss an October 16 conference in London to gather financial and moral support for broadening the impact of international media in the DPRK. Whiton reviewed current efforts, including independent and USG-sponsored radio and TV programs. The MFA officials expressed serious concern with the human rights and humanitarian situation in the DPRK and suggested that improvement is unlikely in the short-term. They also lamented that Poland's diplomatic mission in the DPRK has limited access to information.

POLAND AND NORTH KOREA HAVE "DIFFERENT" RELATIONSHIP

¶3. (C) Because of Poland's history with the Soviet Union, the DPRK believes that Poland has a better understanding of the situation in North Korea than most countries. On the negative side, the DPRK regime would not like to emulate the kind of change that has occurred in Poland, which would mean the regime's collapse. Ciebien, an East Asia hand, said the regime prefers the Vietnam model for change over the Chinese one. With only USD 3 million in trade with North Korea, the MFA officials said that Poland does not have significant economic influence. Ciebien cited the Kaison industrial complex as having the potential for positive influence, despite its weaknesses (e.g., labor exploitation, likely DPRK profit-skimming, and only the facade of change, etc). Ciebien said the GoP currently provides humanitarian assistance to the DPRK, primarily through grants and small projects (e.g., donations of tractors and school computers).

PLANS FOR EXCHANGE PROGRAM WITH DPRK

¶4. (S) Ciebien said the MFA is working with the DPRK to design an exchange program to bring young North Koreans to Poland, and is hoping to host the first group in October or

November 2008. Although aware the visitors would be hand-picked by the DPRK and would likely include security agents, the GoP believes any exposure of DPRK citizens to the outside world is better than nothing. (In a subsequent conversation with Poloff, Ciebien said that the plans are moving forward, and that the North Korean visitors would be "closely monitored.")

#### POLAND WILLING TO SHARE EXPERTISE AT LONDON CONFERENCE

¶5. (C) As a possible model, Pisarski pointed to Poland's active radio program and the establishment of a satellite TV station transmitting out of Poland. Although targeted primarily at the Polish diaspora (including in Belarus and the US) the programming includes news reporting and provides a free-press perspective. (Note: While the quality of the programming has been criticized, the initiatives represent a significant GoP investment in disseminating independent programs and news. End Note.) All agreed that more effective DPRK-focused media programming would require more cooperation with the DPRK's neighbors. Pisarski and Ciebien reported an increased number of smuggled radios in North Korea despite the harsh punishments, and expressed hope that more North Koreans are listening to independent and USG-sponsored radio and TV services. At least the DPRK elite has access to radios and TVs, Pisarski said, and any real change will first require a change among the elite. Polish officials expressed an interest in sending a representative to the October 16 conference to present lessons learned from Polish involvement in Belarus.

#### RUSSIAN INFLUENCE NEEDED

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¶6. (C) According to Ciebien, the Polish Embassy in Pyongyang has regular contact with DPRK officials and presses them on human rights issues. When the DPRK Vice Foreign Minister visited Poland for consultations in May 2008, Ciebien said, the GoP was "quite open" in its criticism of the human rights situation in North Korea. Ciebien stated that DPRK officials did not react negatively, as they have in the past. Ciebien reported that the DPRK Ambassador to Poland, Kim Pyong-il is the brother-in-law of Kim Jong-il. Ciebien opined that the future of the DPRK would depend on the Six-Party talks, China's position vis-a-vis the DPRK, and Russia -- which in his view, may be the most important).

#### COMMENT

¶7. (S) The GoP's concern about North Korea, its experience with post-Communist transitions, and its Embassy's access to key DPRK officials make Poland a natural partner to engage North Korea on human rights. Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Ryszard Schnepf will travel to Pyongyang October 16 ostensibly in connection with the 60th anniversary of Polish-North Korean diplomatic relations. Schnepf will also reportedly hold talks with DPRK Foreign Minister Pak Ui Chun and his deputy Kung Sok Ung regarding the future of the Six-Party negotiations. According to Ciebien, the GoP is looking for opportunities to create a "snowball effect," but is aware that change in North Korea could go in many directions. That said, MFA officials find it difficult to imagine that any change would be a change "for the worse."

¶8. (U) Deputy Special Envoy Whiton did not have the opportunity to clear this message.

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